Patricia A. Bochi

Time in the Art of Ancient Egypt: From Ideological Concept to Visual Construct*

ABSTRACT

The pervasiveness and immutability of time forced the ancient Egyptians to deal with its impact on everyday life in various ways. Yet, so far most studies have focused on the written expression of the concern for time, thus overlooking other areas of cognition equally capable of accounting for the ancient Egyptians' attempt at addressing the issue. Thus, the present study focuses on the way in which the ancient Egyptians conceptualized and visually represented the phenomenon of time. After examining the image-making process, the study analyzes the socio-cultural implications of such visual approach within the context of ancient Egyptian society.

"Life is a passage; trees fall . . ." said the man who was weary of life in a Middle Kingdom story of the 12th Dynasty (Papyrus Berlin 3024).[1]

The ancient Egyptian preoccupation with time in general permeated every aspect of that culture, yet it is in the written quest for immortality that traditionally the conceptualization of time is thought to have found its most eloquent expression. The perception that the texts, albeit not expository by nature, may have been the preferred mode of expression,

KronoScope 3:1 (2003)
© Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, 2003

through which the ancient Egyptians expressed their attitude towards time, derives from the scholarly focus on this type of evidence, rather than being a reflection of the dearth of information in other areas of cognition. One such unexplored area is that of the visual arts, in which the concern for time assumed specific modes of expression, and whose analysis can reveal not only the ancient Egyptian attitude towards time, but also the equally important cognitive process that would have been involved in solving some of the issues that time so critically posed.

A) The concept of time according to the texts

The Egyptians probably perceived the phenomenon of time at first through the cyclical rhythm of nature, but also through the impact that its pervasiveness and immutability had on life. Eventually, these observations led to the formulating of concepts about its nature[2] and to the creation of an ideology, in which time was conceived in pairs of opposite yet complementary notions. In this way, time was either human or divine. The "here-time" or that which was experienced by the individual while on earth was opposed to the "there-time" to which the individual had access at death.[3]

Life in this world was viewed as the mere phase preceding life in the next world, which was sanctioned by death - the ritual threshold one had to cross in order to reach immortality. Predetermined at birth, the individual's lifetime (*ahaw*) was defined as the temporal space that was allocated to him/her by the gods, within the limits of birth and death, thus making the advent of one's death as being "one's time".[4] Yet, the Egyptians aspired to live to the ripe old age of 110 years. When compared with the inexhaustible amount of time believed to be available in the afterlife, this quest for additional time on earth was in fact modest. The duration of human existence was perceived to be indeed so brief as to be but a dream[5] or a passage, and the equivalent to a single hour of the afterlife.[6]

By contrast, the "there-time" or divine time lay beyond the confines of the human sphere and was broadly defined as "eternity" or as being either *neheh* or *djet*, that is, cyclical perpetuity and absolute timelessness, respectively.[7] Thus, the afterlife was perceived to be a sphere in which the effects of time were suspended, a mirror of the Egyptian desire to maintain society as created.

As opposed to the older lunar calendar, which was based on the moon's cycle and reserved for religious cultic activities, the civil calendar was based upon the annual rotation of the sun and covered all other aspects of life. Thus, the year (*renepet*) consisted of 360 days, to which five days were added. It was divided into twelve months of thirty days (*sw*)[8] each, and three seasons (*ter*) of four thirty-day months (*abed*).[9] Daily life activities were organized according to a well-defined time structure, whose various units were named with specific terms.[10] By contrast, no general word for time appears to have been used.

The Egyptians distinguished events in relation to time through grammar and syntax,[11] and used devices, such as dates and phrases, in order to infuse the stories with a sense of time.[12] However, it is as a literary theme that time inspired some of the most moving pieces of writing, in which the futility of this life and the uncertainties about the next were exhorted.

If so much information can be inferred from the study of the texts, one may also imagine that the visual mode can be perceived as constituting a text, equally capable of providing insight into the Egyptian system of thought.

B) The images

Before examining the visual representation of time *per se*, it should be pointed out that representations that would ordinarily be expected to be part of the artistic repertoire, given their temporal implications, were not. The reason for such absence may be found in the texts. Indeed, the texts generally reflected a reluctance to mention directly, if at all, concepts with negative values, displaying instead a strong preference for the use of metaphors and euphemisms such as death as sleep or as a form of departure.[13] The same reluctance was also encountered in the visual arts, where the representation of such notions was either circumvented through the use of metaphors, or simply avoided.[14] In this way, illness, injury, old age, death, and the end of the world were virtually never depicted.[15] While illness and injury signified change, even if only in terms of a temporary disruption of ordered time, old age evoked the irrevocable passage of time - a gripping reminder of the futility of human life. As for death, albeit an ideologically welcome threshold, it evoked a radical change, one that marked a discontinuity with time as experienced in this

world. Seen as agents of change, these events embodied notions that would have caused anxiety, thus preventing their representation.[16]

The visual rendition of time may be divided into two main types: the images conveying a sense of time and the images representing time.[17] Both types represent significant facets of the Egyptian approach to the visual reckoning of time and should therefore be examined together.[18]

1. Temporality by inference

Temporality or the degree to which images conveyed a sense of time was inferred from a number of characteristics, many of which are perhaps more relevant to the three-dimensional works. In terms of sculpture, the hard materials such as sandstone and granite, out of which the statues of deities, royalty, and members of the elite were carved, also had the property of permanence, of withstanding change through time. In addition, the massive proportions, the static and frontal poses, and the lack of facial expressions all conveyed a sense of formal dignity, even rigidity, which had the effect of suggesting a conscious avoidance of the ravages of time, as seen, for example, in the 4th Dynasty graywacke statue of King Menkaure and his queen found at Giza.[19] (Fig. 1) The fact that the statues were often attached to a back pillar for support, while only partially freed from the rock, further reinforced the sense of immobility.[20] Through the strength, permanence, and inaction immanent in these representations, the Egyptians, then, gave shape to their concern for overcoming time by creating forms, whose physical integrity could not be impaired by time - in other words, forms that defied time.

Similarly, in terms of two-dimensional images, time was conveyed through the movement of the figures in space, or through the images' ability to tell stories, that is, through their narrativity.[21]

Unlike the elite, the socially low-ranking figures displayed a variety of poses, which occasionally even conveyed a moment in time, such as in the banquet scene from the 18th Dynasty Theban tomb of Nebamun, in which the guests are shown somewhat rigidly seated, in the upper register, while in the lower register, the musicians and dancers perform animatedly. (Fig. 2) The impression of instant is also captured in such scenes as those depicting Egyptian officers either holding or striking Nubian captives, from the Saqqara tomb of

Horemheb of the same dynasty. (Fig. 3) Typically, however, actions negated the spontaneity and uniqueness of gestures,[22] as illustrated by the motif of fishing and fowling in the marshes frequently depicted in the elite tombs. (Figs. 4 and 5) The two officials, Nebamun and Menna, are shown in identical pose, that is, with their arms raised about to strike the birds with a throw stick. No other aspects of the activity are highlighted. Individuals existed in a temporal vacuum, in which time did not evolve but was suspended, thus giving concrete shape to the ideological notion of *status quo*. Moreover, figures typically occupied a space that was ill-defined, which imparted a neither-here-nor-there quality to the scenes, hence, by analogy, a space free of time.

If, in formal terms, a narrative or the telling of a story is defined by the sequential presentation of specific events that take place through time,[23] then, the absence of either space or time produces images that are non-narrative or iconic.

So if, according to this definition, the depicted events must exist in relation to time for a story to unfold successfully, then, true pictorial narratives in Egyptian art were rare.[24] Indeed, typically, scenes were laid out with no apparent concern for chronology, presenting instead generalized actions designed to illustrate the official's past existence. In other words, the scenes did not act as biographical records, in the literal sense, but rather as symbolic markers of the individuals' conduct in this world according to *maat*, the Egyptian principle of truth, justice, and cosmic order.

A brief trend of narrative exposition, however, occurred in the New Kingdom, between the 15th and 13th centuries B.C. The reliefs depicting the Egyptian expedition to Punt (southern coast of modern Sudan), carved on the walls of the 18th Dynasty mortuary temple of Queen Hatshepsut, at Deir el-Bahari, are generally thought to represent the earliest attempt at true pictorial narrative. Yet, the scenes owed their so-called narrative character to the inclusion of anecdotal details about the local setting such as the village huts built on stilts and about the steatopygeous Queen of Punt, whose physical appearance must have been different enough from that of Egyptian women to be noted. Thus, while depicting an actual event, the scenes did not however convincingly unfold the visual story of the expedition, but recorded culturally significant highlights of the journey.

The subsequent 19th Dynasty of the Ramesside period is thought to be the period when the narrative genre culminated, and is illustrated by the rendering of the battle of Kadesh (Syria), fought by Ramses II (circa 1274 B.C.).[25] Recorded in several versions, the battle showed the events with some specificity, including information about, for example, the placement of forces and the local topography, even including incidents, such as the capture of enemy spies. Yet, despite the formal specificity, the representation essentially showed the king in his chariot, almost single-handedly repelling the enemy around him, unfettered by the content of the accompanying texts, which related that the battle was in fact a stalemate and that the armies had disengaged from the conflict.[26] Thus, the reliefs functioned as an icon for the Egyptian military might over the Hittites. (Fig. 6) By presenting the event in a pseudo-narrative mode, the king sought to validate the outcome of the battle through a mode that assumed the appearance of objective integrity,[27] and which Paul Ricoeur calls the "illusion of sequence".[28]

The absence of true pictorial narratives in Egyptian art ultimately suggests that images were used not so much to communicate stories as to signify or reference ideas, in which the presence of events was insignificant or epiphenomenal.[29]

2. Images *of* time

As detailed guides to the beyond concerned with complex issues such as time and justice, the New Kingdom books of the netherworld constituted the best source for the visual representation of the concept of time, in the form of illustrations accompanying the texts.[30] In the Fourth Hour of the *Book of Gates* found in the tomb of Sety I, time was depicted as a gigantic serpent, called Metui (or Metuty), the "doubly twisted one". Carried by twelve figures of deities, who are said (in the text above) to measure out lifetimes to the blessed dead in the West, namely, the realm of the dead, and surmounted by very large hieroglyphs for "lifetime" above its body, Metui is clearly identified as the "dispenser of time" in the beyond.[31] (Fig. 7)

In the Fifth Hour of the same book found in the tomb of Ramses VI, time was also represented as an endless rope coming out of the mouth of the mummiform god Aken. (Fig. 8) The text above the scene explains that Aken is giving

birth to time by spinning out of his mouth a doubly twisted rope. Although not reproduced in the drawing, stars, the hieroglyphic determinative for hours, were placed above each loop, thus identifying the latter as an hour of the afterlife or an entire lifetime, which the god "took away", once it had passed.[32]

Designed to capture the essence of the texts, these illustrations or vignettes were by definition formally concise, as they included only key elements, while eliminating all indication of setting and specificity, hence any sense of narrative. Both the lack of defined context and the locus outside of the human experience imparted an alien quality and a sense of atemporality that mirrored the concept of eternity expressed in the texts. As a result, the images had a highly symbolic or iconic value.

Specific temporal concepts, such as the seasons of the year, were also personified.[33] For example, the representation of the "inundation" season as a large female figure, shown carrying a tray of offerings, was found in the so-called "world chamber" in the 5th Dynasty sun temple of King Niuserre, at Abu Gurob.[34] (Fig. 9) *Akhet*, the hieroglyph for the inundation season, which the figure wears as a headdress, identifies it as embodying that particular time of year. Next to the figure are scenes of nature and of activities typical of that season such as netting fish and trapping birds, whose physical proximity further clarified the reference to the season. (Fig. 10) While these scenes were formally grounded in the earthly world, the very presence of beings, whose existence was as remote from the reality of human experience as the snake Metui in the afterlife, suggests that conceptually they were not. Thus, just as these scenes embodied the idea of nature's cycle of fecundity, so did the personifications of seasons act as ideograms for the perpetual repetition of the natural cycle, and hence, straddled both the human and the divine realm, which ultimately was the one they represented.

What characterized the images in this group was, first, their subject matter - solely focused on the depiction of a particular aspect of time; second, their function - as a visual equivalent to time by means of either concrete forms such as a snake or a rope, or identifiable forms such as hieroglyphs; and third, their mode: these images constituted the most direct visual mode of expressing time, although, strictly defined, they were metaphors. In short, these images can be called images *of* time.

3. Images *referring to* time

The elite decorated their tombs with scenes that were designed in part to commemorate the deceased owner while ensuring the latter's afterlife by provisioning him/her with food, entertainment, and prayers. Among the various scenes were scenes of the field works, which took place annually according to a predetermined pattern. (Fig. 11) By analogy, the scenes evoked the natural seasons and, by extension, the periodicity of nature and of time in general. To be sure, tasks such as the felling of trees and the measuring of fields typically associated with the beginning and the end of the agricultural cycle, respectively, and spatially separate from one another on the wall would have reinforced the cyclical aspect of time.[35]

Another example of representation of time was that of the *sed*-festival, a jubilee, which celebrated the king's renewal of his earthly powers and the reaffirmation of his divine nature, after the first thirty years of his reign and thereafter at more frequent intervals, if the king (euphemistically) wished. This important event was recorded in many royal inscriptions, but few pictorial representations have survived. One such representation shows the double image of King Senwosret III of the 12th Dynasty (1878-1843 B.C.) wearing a special cloak, with the red crown of Lower Egypt and the white crown of Upper Egypt, and seated back to back in a double pavilion built expressly for the ceremony. (Fig. 12)

Even though in actuality few kings celebrated the festival, in principle, its representation constituted the visual record of a historical event. Insofar as the image represented an event taking place in the human world, it was expressed in human terms through the use of elements from the earthly world, such as the ceremonial pavilion. Yet, since the festival occurred at prescribed intervals, the image also evoked time in general and cyclical time in particular. In formal terms, the event's symbolic aspect was expressed by the heraldic composition of the scene and the king's interaction with personified hieroglyphs. Therefore, just as the image combined elements of different semantic registers, namely, mimetic scenes and iconic signs, in order to construct its meaning, so was the metaphor it achieved a combination of history and myth.

Images could also refer to time as past. When clearly directed towards the past, whether historical or mythical, these works of art were called "archaizing".[36] The practice of referring to specific periods or individuals from the

past is to be distinguished, however, from that of continuing the traditions of the past. In the first instance, the revival of specific forms corresponded to a deliberate attempt to reproduce the artistic forms associated with a particular era, typically for political propaganda or for prestige. By contrast, the survival of artistic forms reflected the desire to maintain order in the created world. In this case, despite its ideological motivation, the persistent tie to the past engendered repetitive forms, which in a sense "dulled" or attenuated the references to the past. These images, therefore, cannot be viewed as images referring to time specifically.

The practice of archaism reached its zenith during the Late Period, between the 8th and 6th centuries B.C. As foreigners from Kush (present day northern Sudan), the rulers of the 25th Dynasty sought to legitimize their rule by establishing a tie with Egyptian tradition through the imitation of artistic works from earlier Egyptian periods. By contrast, the native rulers of the 26th Dynasty sought to associate themselves with successful periods such as the Old and the New Kingdoms by emulating the artistic forms of these golden eras. The 26th Dynasty statue of Tjayasetimu (Fig. 13), whose broad-shouldered, well-toned body is a tribute to Old Kingdom models such as the 4th Dynasty statue of King Menkaure (Fig. 1) created some two thousands years earlier, is a good illustration of this practice.

Although identifiable, the models were never slavishly copied, since they were not designed to remain in the past - their sphere of origin - but to serve the present user's end. The act of bringing an image associated with the past into the present *in effect* projected a message for posterity, resulting in the coalescence of three temporal spheres: past, present, and future.

If taken at face value, the new image was but a shell, with a simple immediate subject matter, which depended upon the apprehension of the specific allusion by the viewer for its real meaning to be activated. In other words, the archaizing image constituted a statement, whose real signification emerged only *if* or *when* the tie to the past was realized. Once the intended connection was established, the archaizing image embodied the notion of linear time.

The images in this group were characterized by the fact that they had both an *explicit* subject matter - such as agriculture - and an *implicit* subject

matter - time. They were not images *of* time but images *referring to* time, and all transcended the specific time they evoked by ultimately referring to yet another form of time. In this way, agriculture transcended the periodicity of nature by evoking the eternal repetition of time, hence, divine time. Similarly, the sed-festival transcended the thirty-year cycle of human time by evoking the cyclical perpetuity of divine time. And finally, the archaizing images transcended the spheres of past, present, and future by evoking the linear continuity characteristic of divine time.

C) From concept to construct: the cognitive process and its significance

Thus far, the evidence seems to suggest that the representation of time did not evolve as a single continuum of one mode, but as a plurality of modes existing concurrently, begging the question as to why there existed such a breadth of expression at any one point.[37] Assuming that the notion of time in most of these images was intentionally represented, the forces behind the creation of more than one mode in order to do so were prompted by the complexity of the concept, on the one hand, and by the audience, on the other. Let us now review the breadth of options and the specific ways in which each of these accommodated the implied viewer.

First, the illustrations in the books of the netherworld. As the sole purpose of these images was to represent the concept of time as expressed in the texts, they unequivocally *became* images *of* time.[38] In other words, the snake Metui or the rope spun by Aken *were* time. Yet, given the high iconic value and arbitrary nature of these symbols and, hence, the significant distance between the signifier (snake) and the signified (time), the audience was required to make a fairly substantial leap in order to grasp their meaning.[39] The visual complexity of the imagery therefore demanded analysis *a priori* tenable if addressed to an educated audience, that is, one that had access to the written texts.[40] Such dependence would have restricted significantly the apprehension of their content to the literate minority, which has recently been estimated to represent about 5% of the population.[41] Yet, conceivably, the nonliterate viewer might have been able to understand the images if the symbols for time were either used as common metaphors for time in the spoken language,[42] or associated with time in the course of daily life. Thus, events

such as the periodic shedding of the snake and the use of a knotted rope to measure the harvested fields before the annual inundation would easily have signified the onset of a new cycle of time in the peoples' mind. Once transposed to the otherworldly images, however, the latters' "decontextualized" or alien iconography would likely have kept the non-literate from grasping their meaning.

Second, the archaizing images. To the question as to whom would have been the intended audience, the answer is less clear. While it is reasonable to assume that the members of the educated class would have had knowledge of the distant past, whether historical or mythical, others might have as well. Recent studies have shown that indeed more people might have been aware of the past than previously thought.[43] Given the uneven familiarity with the past, it is difficult to determine the degree to which archaizing images would have communicated the intended references to the viewer. However, the evidence would tend to suggest that the emulation of specific artistic forms from the past produced the expected results in most cases, or such practice might have been abandoned.

At the very least, then, the archaizing images demanded *some* knowledge of the past in order for their significance to be grasped by the audience. Without this knowledge, the references to the past were left out of the visual equation, causing the new images to lose their true significance. Given their potentially elusive significance, archaizing images represented, therefore, an intellectual exercise typically, although not necessarily, restricted to the educated class.

Third, the images depicting natural events were scenes of everyday life, which would have been familiar to all viewers. The regular pattern of recurrence, according to which these events took place, would have led to the idea of the passage of time as an unending repetition and probably, by extension, to the higher concept of eternity. Similarly, the references to time in the representations of the *sed*-festival may have been easy to infer, given the fact that the event occasioned elaborate preparations that would have involved many individuals.[44] In both cases, the suggested chain of mental associations would have been processed unconsciously, dispensing the audience from the necessity of being formally educated. Here, time was embodied in its concrete manifestations, whether natural or socially constructed, to which virtually all Egyptians would have been able to relate.

Fourth, and finally, the sense of timelessness and of the unchanging state of affairs, to which the Egyptians aspired and which was inferred from the images' formal properties, was grounded in the intimate knowledge of daily life, and formally constructed through artistic conventions of universal reach. Temporality as a moment "frozen in time" was not defined in terms of either past or present, but rather as a realm, where past, present, and future transcended their conventional boundaries and coalesced to produce "quintessential" time. Viewers, who presumably shared the same ideology, would have apprehended the images and their content intuitively, that is, without necessitating further cultural coding. The association between the signifier (figures, scenes) and the signified (timelessness) would have required from the audience an intellectual leap that would also have been easily made.

Just as the natural manifestations of time served as the basis for the conceptualization of time, so did this same natural experience provide the impetus to visualize time.[45] In this way, the passage of time evoked a long continuum of events, whose linearity was easily embodied in the snake, a very common creature in Egypt,[46] and in the rope, also a common object. In addition, both had the ability to evoke the cyclical aspect of time. Similarly, the hours, relatively brief time units were evoked by tiny forms - the stars - lost in the immensity of the sky, and which by analogy were easily disposed of in the visual field, just like the hours were in life.

Although the elements in the images *of* time were carefully chosen for their formal ability to evoke specific properties attributed to time and taken from the experiential world, the symbols did not, of necessity, resemble time. Instead, they were in effect an arbitrary selection, whose meaning would have appeared esoteric to the non-initiated. More importantly, however, is the way in which these elements were assembled as they formed images that represented a world that would have been alien to the viewer, thus making their identification *de facto* counterintuitive, and requiring the help of the texts to decode the visual language thus created.[47]

By contrast, the images *referring to* time dealt with (or appeared to deal with) the real world and reality bound experiences, either by taking wholesale elements from the experiential world, or by combining them with elements from the conceptual world (such as hieroglyphs).

Conclusion

To sum up, it would seem that the ancient Egyptians grappled with their preoccupation with the concept of time by formulating visual metaphors, which, while vested in either external referents, or properties intrinsic to the images, were all grounded in everyday experiences. Yet, the images concentrated on the eternal, never-ending aspect of time, hence giving shape to its positive implications while masking its negative effects. In other words, the images (re)-presented an idealized version of the reality of time. Only through this process of denial, it seems, could the ancient Egyptians approach a concept so difficult to deal with, given its complexity to fathom and its ineluctability to reckon.

However, the fact that distinct artistic modes were even created speaks not only of the conscious effort made to address the issue of time, but also of the awareness of the audience. As the intelligibility of the images ranged from being arcane and analytical to being virtually universal and intuitive, it further suggested the effort to resonate effectively with an audience with varying cognitive potentials.

By presenting a censored and idealized version of time, while adapting the images for the benefit of all, the ancient Egyptians responded to the very human need to control the fear of the unknown, couched within their own cultural frame of references. They thus created images with the didactic purpose of making the concept of time more fathomable, even "palatable".

Ultimately, the ancient Egyptian representations of time were visual constructs, whose function was twofold: to explicate time, on the intellectual level and, on the emotional level, to reduce the deep-seated anxiety provoked by the thought of *tempus fugit*.

Notes

* The present paper is a slightly modified version of a paper read at the conference on "Time and Temporality in the Ancient World", at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, April 19-20, 2002. I would like to thank Irene Winter for her constructive comments on an earlier draft, and Holly Pittman and David Silverman for their interest and support.

[1] The story, a dialogue between a man, who wished to die, and his soul, who threatened to abandon him if he did so prematurely, with dire consequences for his immortality, is but one reference to the ancient Egyptian concern for time. For the translation of this well-known literary text, see Miriam Lichtheim, "The Dispute between a Man and his Ba" in *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 3 vols., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 1:164. For a summary discussion on the text, see Wendy Raver, "*Man Who Was Weary of Life"* in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, 3 vols., ed. Donald B. Redford (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 2:340 (hereafter cited as *OEAE*).

[2] For a recent overall discussion on the ancient Egyptian view of time, including references, see Gerald E. Kadish, "Time" *OEAE*, 3:405-09; also Lászlo Kákosy, "Zeit", ed. Wolfgang Helck et al., *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, 7 vols., (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1972-92) 6:1361 (hereafter cited as *LÄ*).

[3] Jan Assmann, *Zeit und Ewigkeit im alten Ägypten: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Ewigkeit* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1975), 11.

[4] The role of fate in the ancient Egyptian understanding of time is developed by Siegfried Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, trans. Ann E. Keep, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973), 75-80.

[5] The analogy of the human existence as a dream is mentioned in one of the three so-called harper's songs found in the Theban tomb of the priest Neferhotep (TT 50); see Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 3 vols., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 2:116.

[6] The theme is expressed, for instance, in the "Instruction to King Merikare", see Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature* 1:101.

[7] Despite the very large number of studies on the significance of these two terms, these remain controversial. The debate is largely defined by the opposite views of Erik Hornung, Jan Assmann, and Wolfhart Westendorf. For Erik Hornung, both terms refer to the totality of time, while each one is associated to a particular context (*Idea Into Image: Essays on Ancient Egyptian Thought*, trans. Elizabeth Bredeck (New York: Timken Publishers, 1992), 68-69; and "Zeitliches Jenseits im alten Ägypten" *Eranos Jahrbuch* 47 (1978): 290-307). For Jan Assmann, the terms form a pair of complementary principles of time and eternity, operating within this world and outside of it, respectively ("Ewigkeit" *LÄ* 2:48; and *Zeit und Ewigkeit*, see note 3, above). And finally for Wolfhart Westendorf, the terms are clearly distinct from one another, with *neheh* as time being born out of *djet* signifying space ("Die Geburt der Zeit aus dem Raum" *Göttinger Miszellen* 63 (1983): 71-76 (hereafter cited as *GM*); and "Raum und Zeit als Entsprechungen der beiden Ewigkeiten" in *Fontes atque Pontes. Eine Festgabe für Hellmut Brunner*, ed. Manfred Görg, (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1983), 422-35. For additional references, see Patricia A. Bochi, "Images

of Time in Ancient Egyptian Art," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 31 (1994): note 12, p. 56 (hereafter cited as *JARCE*).

[8] The word for day, the opposite of night, however, is *hrw*.

[9] Anthony J. Spalinger, "Calendars" in *OEAE* 1:224-27.

[10] For example, *haw* and *rek* referred to a block of time, typically the reignal period of a king, while *sp* referred to an occurrence and *at* to a brief moment. The meaning of some of these terms remains controversial.

[11] Scholars are now of the opinion that a past action was indicated according to whether that action was completed or not, and not, as previously hypothesized, according to its position in relation to the speaker, that is, as a result of a tense system; see James P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian: An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 148-50.

[12] Kadish, "Time", 407-08.

[13] Jan Zandee, *Death as an Enemy, according to Ancient Egyptian Conceptions*, trans. W. F. Klasens (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 11,13, and 81-85. The euphemism for death is particularly interesting given that death was believed to be part of creation. According to utterance 571 (1466 b-d) of the *Pyramid Texts*, death did not exist before creation; see R. O. Faulkner (trans.), *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 226.

[14] Much can be inferred from the use of metaphors; see the study by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); and Paul Frandsen, "On Categorization and Metaphorical Structuring: Some Remarks on Egyptian Art and Language" *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 7:1 (1997): 71-104.

[15] Exceptions, however, exist. One such example can be found in the 21st Dynasty *Book of the Dead*, in which death is depicted as a human-headed, winged serpent with two legs, as cited in Jean-Luc Chappaz and Sandrine Vuilleumier, eds., " *'Sortir au jour': Art égyptien de la Fondation Martin Bodmer*", Cahiers de la Société d'Égyptologie, vol. 7 (Cologny: Fondation Martin Bodmer, 2001), note 24, p. 110.

[16] The representation of children requires a brief comment. Children were depicted as adults-in-miniature, with no special attention to their real appearance and often as mere ideograms of youth. They were perceived as individuals who had not yet reached adulthood and who, for the most part, lacked status in Egyptian society; see Rosalind M. and Jac. J. Janssen, *Growing Up in Ancient Egypt* (London: Rubicon, 1990). The apparent lack of attention given to children in art may have have been due to a variety of factors, one of which subconsciously related to the issue of time. In real terms, childhood represented a relatively brief period of human life and, if couched in Egyptian ideological terms, according to which life on earth lasted but an hour, an even briefer period. Thus, conceivably the depiction of

children might have acted as a reminder of the transitoriness of human existence. In order no to exacerbate this belief, children, just like the other temporally implicative images, would thus have been treated marginally, when not avoided altogether.

[17] While scholars have commented regularly upon the former, they have virtually ignored the latter. See, however, Bochi, "Images of Time", 55-62; and Hornung, *Idea into Image*, chapter 3, for the images pertaining to the books of the afterlife.

[18] It is beyond the scope of this study to establish an exhaustive list of all known images related to time. Rather, what the present paper attempts to do is to classify and categorize the images according to basic criteria, and ultimately to provide scholars with an analytical tool through which to identify images concerned with time.

[19] The statue, from the reign of Menkaure (2532-2510 B.C.), measures in height x width x depth: 142.2 x 57.1 x 55.2 cm (56 x 22 $^{1}/_{2}$ x 21 $^{3}/_{4}$ in.).

[20] Gay Robins, *The Art of Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 19-20.

[21] This approach is epitomized by the study of H. A. Groenewegen-Frankfort, *Arrest and Movement: An Essay on Space and Time in the Representational Art of the Ancient Near East* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), 15-141.

[22] Typically, actions were "frozen" at their most characteristic point, usually the midpoint of the action; see Richard H. Wilkinson, "Gesture" in *OEAE* 2:21.

[23] Many studies on pictorial narratives exist; see, for example, Herbert L. Kessler and Marianna Shreve Simpson, eds., *Pictorial Narrative in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, Studies in the History of Art, vol. 16 (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1985), notably the essays on ancient art by Elizabeth L. Meyers, "Component Design as a Narrative Device in Amarna Tomb Art," 35-51; and Irene J. Winter, "After the Battle is Over: The *Stele of the Vultures* and the Beginning of Historical Narrative in the Art of the Ancient Near East," 11-32. See also G. A. Gaballa, *Narrative in Egyptian Art* (Mainz am Rhein: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1976).

[24] See the by-now classic study by Helene J. Kantor, "Narration in Egyptian Art" *American Journal of Archaeology* 61 (1957), 44-54.

[25] Most of the studies on the battle have focused on the texts. For a general account, see K. A. Kitchen, *Pharaoh Triumphant: The Life and Times of Ramesses II* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1982), 53-64, and 249 for additional references; for a recent general discussion, including bibliographical references, see William J. Murnane, "Kadesh" *OEAE* 2:219-221.

[26] The discrepancy in the messages conveyed by the texts and the reliefs has occasionally been noted (for example, Thomas von der Way, *Die Textüberlieferung Ramses' II. zur Qades-Schlacht: Analyse und Struktur* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1984),

Introduction). However, Betsy M. Bryan has argued for the fact that the reliefs gave a different, rather than complementary, version of the events, see "The Disjunction of Text and Image in Egyptian Art" in *Studies in Honor of William Kelly Simpson*, ed. Peter Der Manuelian, vol. 1, (Boston: Museum of Fines Arts, 1996), 164-66.

[27] Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality" in *On Narrative*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 23.

[28] Paul Ricoeur, "Narrative Time" in *On Narrative*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 165-86.

[29] The intention of signifying ideas concurs with John Baines's suggestion that the early Egyptian preference for tabular layout of information may have been designed to restrict religious access and knowledge; see "Restricted Knowledge, Hierarchy, and Decorum: Modern Perceptions and Ancient Institutions" *JARCE* 27 (1990): 7.

[30] For a good overview of the books of the netherworld, see Erik Hornung, *The Ancient Egyptian Books of the Afterlife*, trans. David Lorton (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).

[31] Erik Hornung, *Eranos* 47: 282-83 and *The Valley of the Kings: Horizon of Eternity*, trans. David Warburton (New York: Timken Publishers, 1990), 142.

[32] Alexandre Piankoff, *The Tomb of Ramesses VI*, ed. N. Rambova, vol. 1, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954), 170. The stars are today barely visible on plate 47 in vol. 2 of the same publication. It is interesting to note that the Egyptian idea of time as a rope being spun out and then swallowed up again, or as a snake swallowing the hours as they pass is reminiscent of the Greek myth of Kronos as related in Hesiod's *Theogony* 459-500, according to which Kronos swallowed his children as soon as they were born and later vomited them up. On the Greek myth, see Apostolos N. Athanassakis, trans. *Hesiod: Theogony, Works and Days, Shield* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 24; I thank Ralph Rosen for the reference to this translation.

[33] Many other examples exist, such as the annual Nile inundation in the form of Hapy, the sun god Re in his morning manifestation as the beetle Khepri and his evening form as the ram-headed god Atum, the daily cycle or the alternating of day and night through the myth of the birth of Re from the sky goddess, Nut.

[34] Elmar Edel and Steffen Wenig, *Die Jarheszeitenreliefs aus dem Sonnenheiligtum des Königs Ne-User-Re* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1974). In rare occurrences, the Egyptian seasons were also personified in the 6th Dynasty tombs of the officials, Mereruka and Khentika, at Saqqara. I examine the significance of these unusual scenes in a forthcoming study.

[35] I originally noted these analogies in "Agricultural Scenes in the Private Tombs of

the Eighteenth Dynasty: A Study in Iconographic Polyvalence" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1992), p. 184; see also "Images of Time," 61-62.

[36] See Peter Der Manuelian, *Living in the Past. Studies in Archaism of the Egyptian Twenty-sixth Dynasty* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1994); and Jack A. Josephson, "Archaism" *OEAE* 1:109-13.

[37] The book illustrations, however, did not develop until relatively late, in the New Kingdom, indicating that while there was a plurality of modes of expression at any one time, this plurality was not necessarily always made up of the same modes.

[38] The desire and the intellectual readiness for "representing" an abstract concept such as time constituted a significant step in human cognition, which played a crucial role in the development of Egyptian visual expression. For a general discussion, see Colin Renfrew, "Towards a Cognitive Archaeology" in *The Ancient Mind: Elements of Cognitive Archaeology*, ed. Colin Renfrew and Ezra B. W. Zubrow, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 8-9.

[39] By nature arbitrary, icons are complex since without the texts they cannot be identified as symbols of time on the sole merit of their formal similarity or associative power. Yet, once identified, icons require no further associations to convey their meaning, as they become conventionalized. In a sense, these images functioned somewhat similarly to the hieroglyphs; see the study by Orly Goldwasser, *From Icon to Metaphor. Studies in the Semiotics of the Hieroglyphs* (Fribourg: University Press/Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995).

[40] These images might be a manifestation of what John Baines calls the willful restriction of access and knowledge, in "Restricted Knowledge," see note 29 above.

[41] Up until now, the rate of literacy has been estimated to be around one percent in studies by John Baines, "Literacy and Ancient Egyptian Society" in *Man*, n.s. 18 (1983): 584; John Baines and Christopher J. Eyre, "Four Notes on Literacy" *GM* 61 (1983): 65-72; and Herman te Velde, "Scribes and Literacy in Ancient Egypt" in *Scripta Signa Vocis: Studies about Scripts, Scriptures, Scribes and Languages in the Near East presented to J. H. Hospers by his Pupils, Colleagues and Friends*, ed. H. L. J. Vanstiphout et al. (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1986), 254. More recently, Leonard Lesko has argued for the possibility that at least five percent of the population was literate, see "Literacy" *OEAE* 2:298.

[42] This point, however, is impossible to verify.

[43] The evidence is discussed by John Baines, "Ancient Egyptian Concepts and Uses of the Past: 3rd to 2nd Millennium BC Evidence" in *Who Needs the Past?: Indigenous Values and Archaeology*, ed. Robert Layton (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 131-49; and Andrea McDowell, "Awareness of the Past in Deir el-Medina" in *Village Voices: Proceedings of the Symposium "Texts from Deir el-Medîna and their Interpretation"*

Leiden, May 31-June 1, 1991", ed. R. J. Demarée and A. Egberts (Leiden: Centre of Non-Western Studies, Leiden University, 1992), 95-109.

[44] The preparation of the festivals greatly stimulated the artistic production, see Arielle P. Kozloff and Betsy M. Bryan, *Egypt's Dazzling Sun: Amenhotep III and his World* (Cleveland: The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1992), 38-41.

[45] Orly Goldwasser and Nathaniel Laor's analysis of the ancient Egyptian script's tenacious ties to concrete objects as a psycholinguistic phenomenon ("The Allure of the Holy Glyphs: A Psycholinguistic Perspective on the Egyptian Script" *GM* 123 (1991): 37-51) provides a parallel to the ancient Egyptian reliance on the familiar world as a source of inspiration for their visual expression.

[46] This familiarity with snakes explains their presence also in the texts, as either negative creatures, like Apophis, who constantly threatened order, or beneficial ones, like Renenutet who, as the goddess of the granary, was associated with the harvest.

[47] In the case of the seasons, however, an attempt appears to have been made at providing a visual annotation to the personified figure by placing seasonally relevant scenes in close physical proximity. As for the books, of course, the issue of intelligibility to the viewer, whether in this world or the next, may be a moot point, given that their use was intended for the deceased in the afterlife and that what mattered was not whether the owner could read the spells or not, but the fact that he/she was buried with them.

Figure 1. King Menkaure (Mycerinus) and Queen, Giza, Menkaure Valley Temple. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Harvard University - Museum of Fine Arts Expedition, 11.1738. © 2002 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

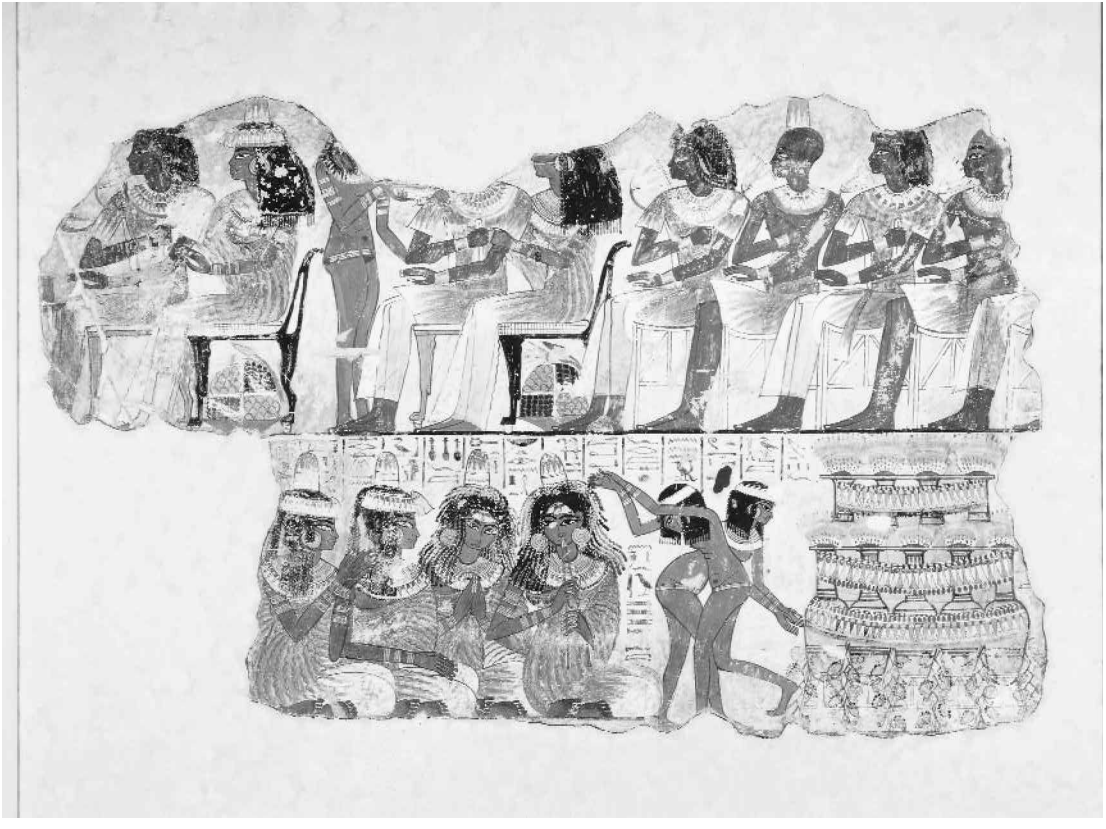

Figure 2. Banquet scene, tomb of Nebamun (EA 37984).
© Copyright The British Museum.

Figure 3. Egyptian officers either holding or striking Nubian captives, tomb of Horemheb, Saqqara. © Copyright Egypt Exploration Society. Reprinted by permission.

Figure 4. Nebamun fowling in the marshes (EA 37977).
© Copyright The British Museum.

Figure 5. Menna fishing and fowling in the marshes.
Facsimile by N. G. Davies, Metropolitan Museum of Art. 30.4.48 - Rogers Fund, 1930.

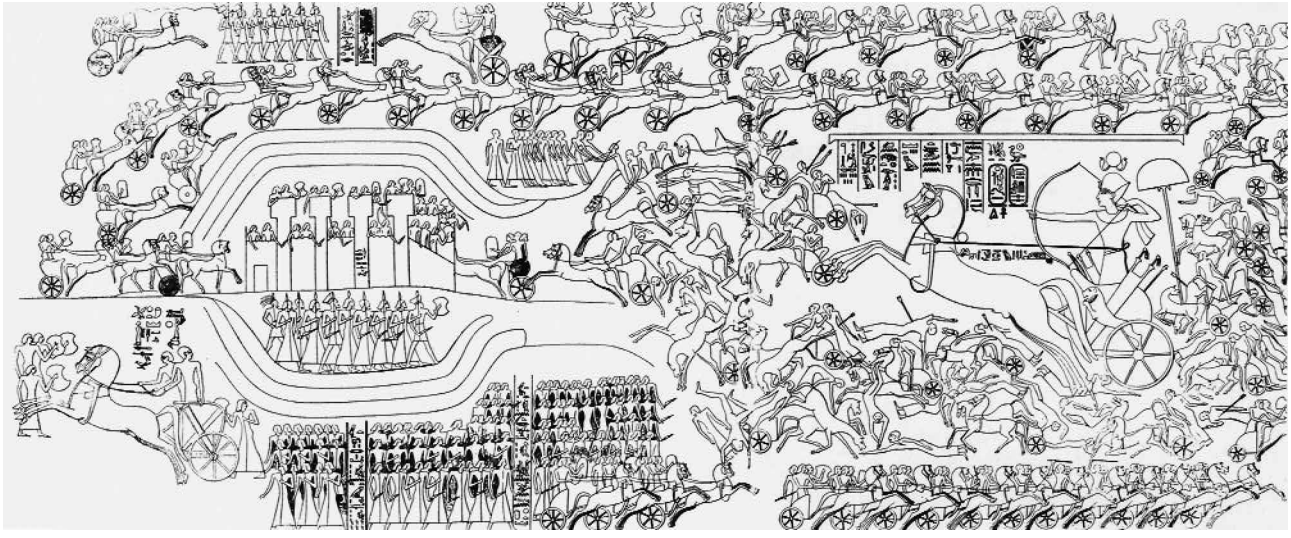

Figure 6. Battle of Kadesh, Luxor temple.
From K. A. Kitchen, *Pharaoh Triumphant: The Life and Time of Ramesses II*. Reprinted by permission.

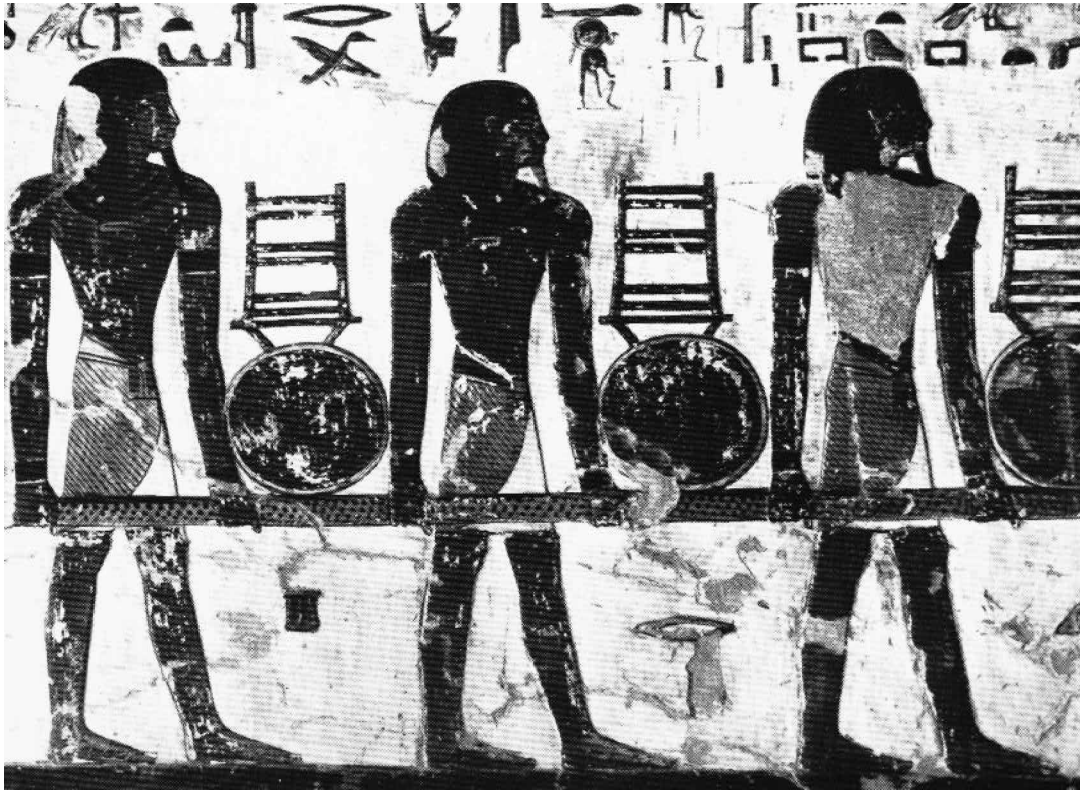

Figure 7. Metui dispensing time, Fourth Hour, Book of Gates, tomb of Sety I. From Erik Hornung, *The Valley of the Kings: Horizon of Eternity*. Photo Andreas Brodbeck. Reprinted by permission.

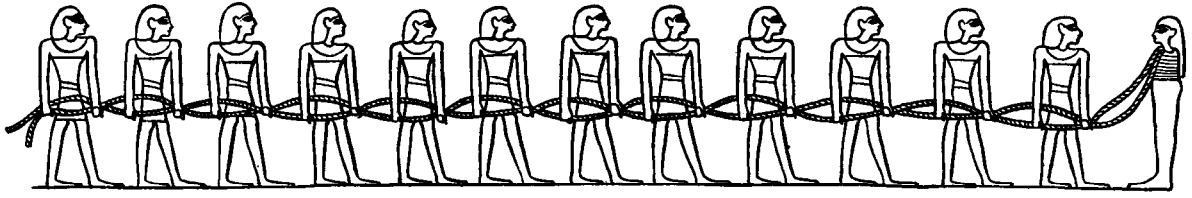

Figure 8. Aken spinning time, Fifth Hour, Book of Gates, tomb of Ramses VI. Piankoff, Alexandre, *The tomb of Ramesses VI*. Vol. I. © Copyright\1954 by PUP. Reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press.

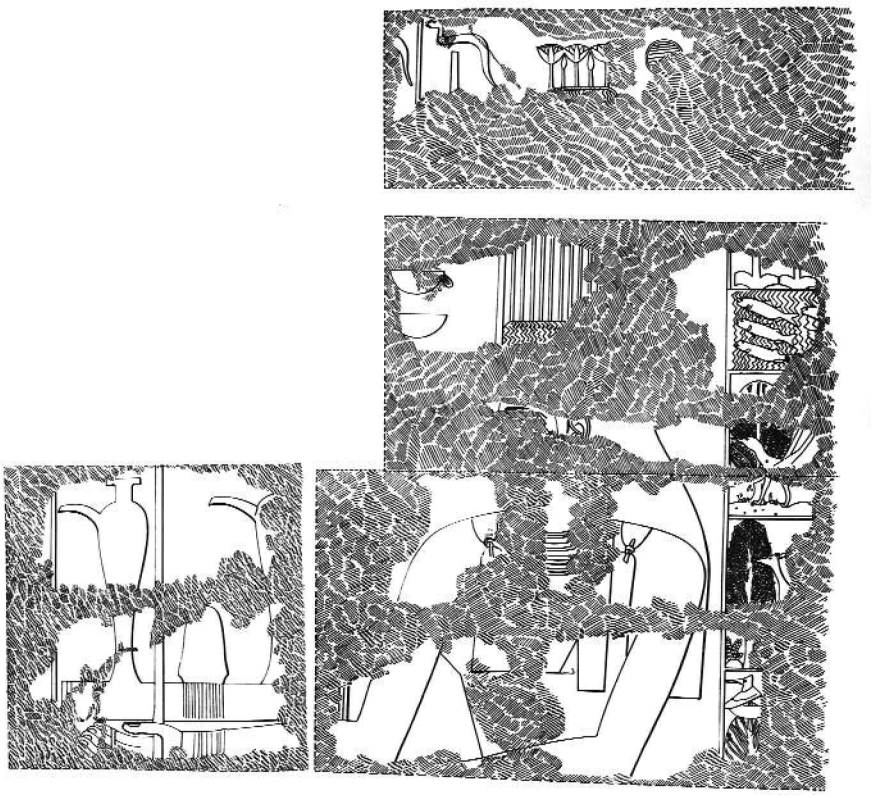

Figure 9. Personification of Inundation season, east wall of 'World Chamber', Sun Temple of Niuserre, Abu Gurob. From Elmar Edel und Steffen Wenig, *Die Jahreszeitenreliefs aus dem Sonnenheiligtum des Königs Ne-User-Re.* Reprinted by permission of Akademie Verlag, Berlin.

Figure 10. Bird-catching with net, 'World Chamber', Sun Temple of Niuserre, Abu Gurob. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Ägyptisches Museum. Photo Jürgen Liepe.

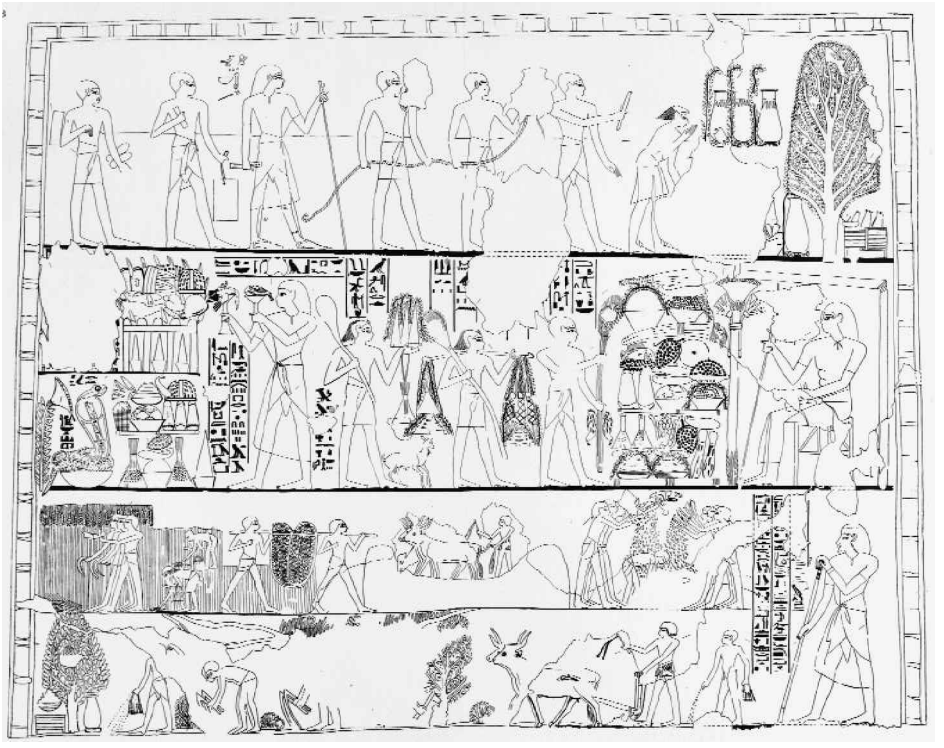

Figure 11. Agriculture, east wall, outer chamber, tomb of Djeserkaraseneb (TT 38), Thebes. From Nina de Garis Davies, *Scenes from Some Theban Tombs*.
© Copyright: Griffith Institute, Oxford.

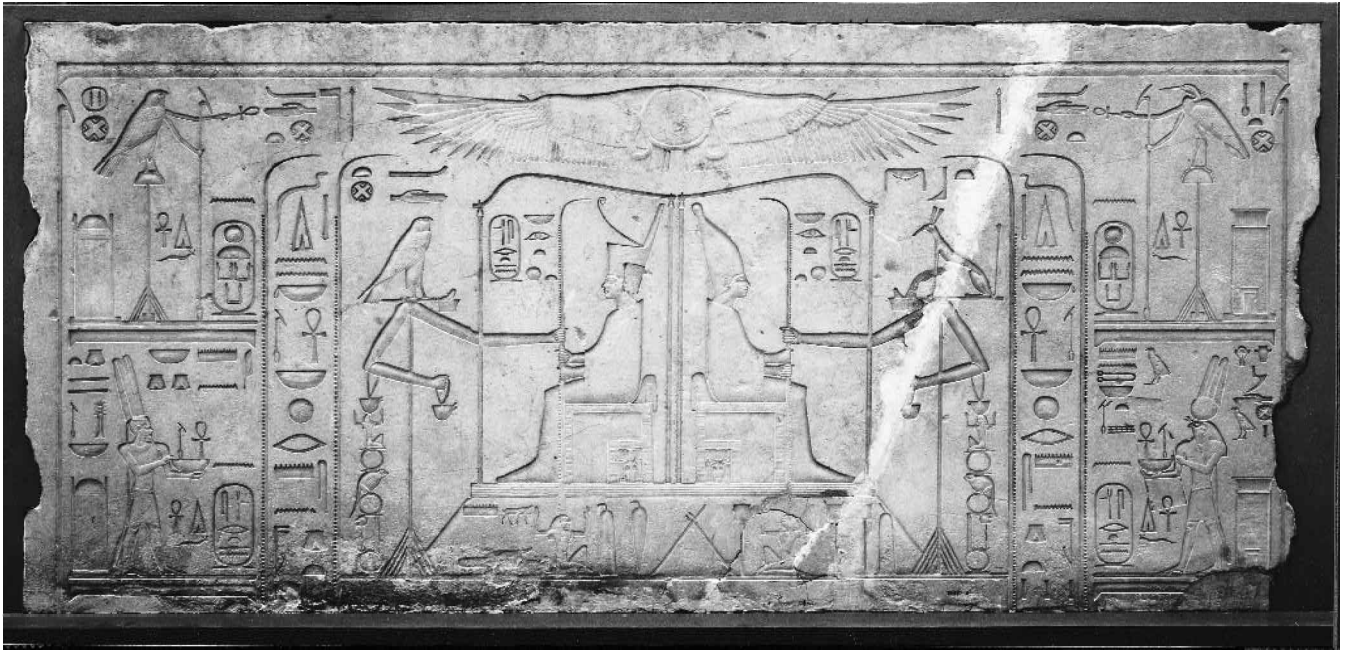

Figure 12. King Senwosret III in the Sed-festival pavilion, Medamud (Cairo Museum, no. JE 56497 A). Photo Hirmer, Munich. Reprinted by permission.

Figure 13. Statue of Tjayasetimu (EA 1682).
© Copyright The British Museum.

Copyright of KronoScope is the property of Brill Academic Publishers and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.